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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

*Memorandum*



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600  
24 July 1966

State Dept. review completed

ARMY review(s) completed.

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HIGHLIGHTS

Hanoi tries to tone down its threats to try captured US pilots in a 23 July announcement that a civilian committee will investigate their "crimes." Sufficient information is now available to confirm the presence of the entire North Vietnamese 324B Division in Quang Tri Province of South Vietnam.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam: Enemy losses total 618 killed as Operation HASTINGS/LAM SON 289 continues in northern Quang Tri Province (Para. 1). A North Vietnamese Army soldier captured in this operation claims casualties of 50 percent in his unit (Para. 2). The entire 324B North Vietnamese Division has been confirmed in Quang Tri Province (Para. 3). Operation CEDAR RAPIDS II initiated in Binh Duong Province along Route 1A (Para. 4). Operation MOKULEIA has been redesignated Operation KOKO HEAD (Para. 5). Viet Cong attacked a US helicopter base near Da Nang causing minor casualties (Para. 6). The Trai Bi Special Forces camp in Tay Ninh Province was attacked by the Viet Cong in another probe to test the defense of the camp (Para. 7).

II. Political Situation in South Vietnam: The Ky government apparently is making some effort to discourage election irregularities while smoothing the way for qualified candidates (Paras. 1-3). Viet Cong attacked VNQDD headquarters in what may be first antielection action (Para. 4).

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Another round of inflationary wage increases appears to be in the offing (Para. 7).

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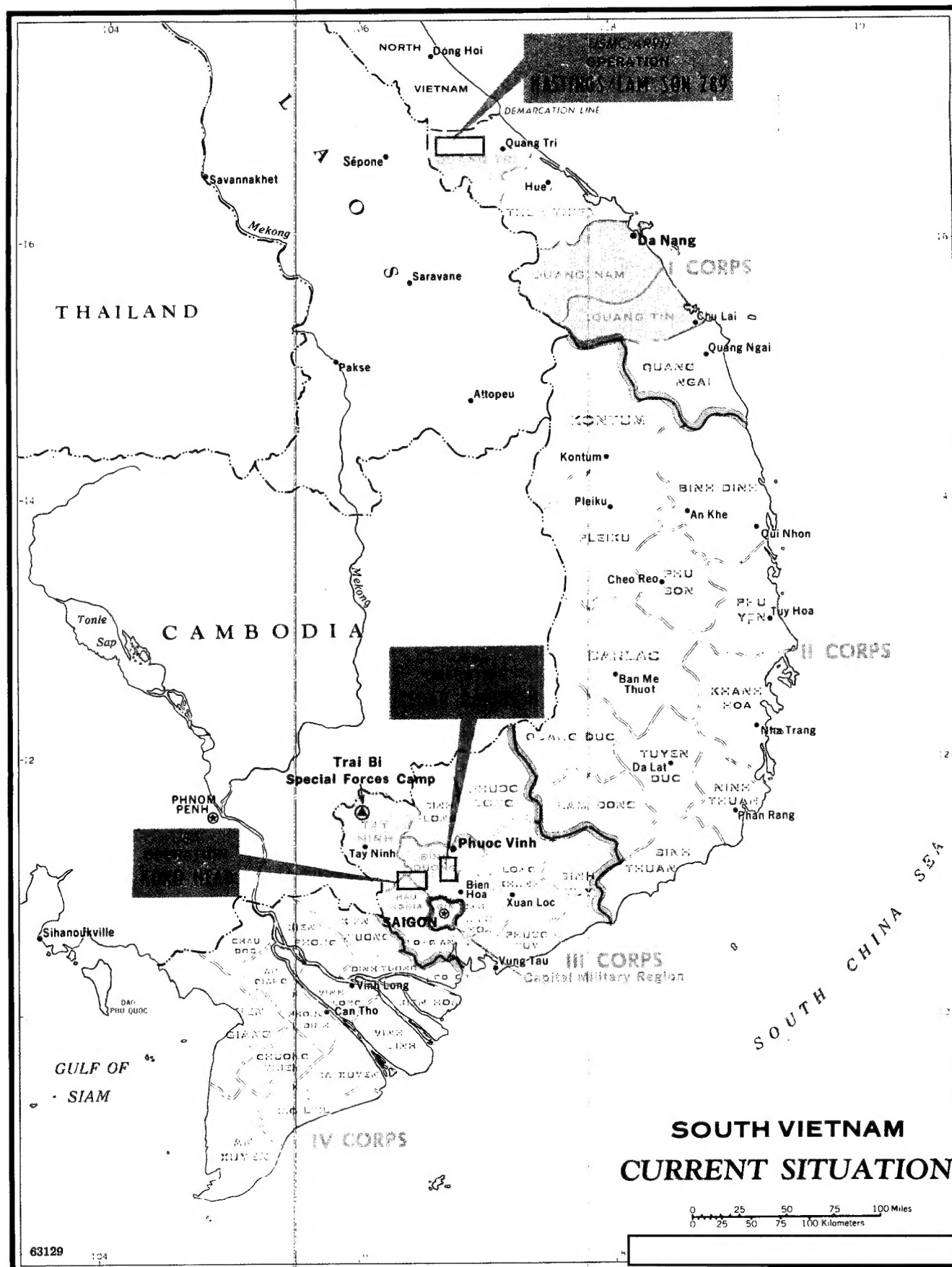
III. Military Developments in North Vietnam: Two US aircraft were downed and one was damaged in the two-day period 22-23 July. The Communists used SAMs, MIGs, and ground fire in their air defense effort (Paras. 1-3).

IV. Other Communist Military Developments:  
There is nothing of significance to report.

V. Communist Political Developments: Hanoi tries to dampen down recent speculation on fate of US airmen but is maintaining a high level of publicity on the subject (Paras. 1-4). Communists resurrecting theme of unity of Vietnamese people on both sides of parallel (Paras. 5-7). Peking propaganda support for Vietnam (Paras. 8-10).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Operation HASTINGS/LAM SON 289 continues in northernmost Quang Tri Province with only light, sporadic contact with enemy forces reported. One US Marine battalion reported a four-hour engagement earlier today in which four marines were killed and 19 wounded. A total of 14 Communists were killed and two captured during this engagement. Later, a US Marine company was reported to be in contact with 100 enemy troops. Reinforcements have been dispatched to their aid. Cumulative casualties for this operation are reported as 93 Americans killed and 339 wounded. Enemy losses include 618 killed (US body count) with unofficial estimates running as high as 1,300 killed.

2. A 15-year-old North Vietnamese Army (NVA) private who was captured in Operation HASTINGS on 21 July said that although he did not know the total number of personnel in either his battalion or his regiment, he had heard that about half of his battalion were either killed or wounded since the beginning of the heavy fighting in northern Quang Tri Province. The private claimed he was assigned to the [REDACTED] NVA Division.

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3. MACV has accepted the presence of the headquarters of the 324B North Vietnamese Army (NVA) Division and two regiments subordinate to this headquarters--the 803rd and the 90th--in Quang Tri Province. The third regiment of this division--the 812th--was accepted by MACV on 12 July. The headquarters unit, reported to be in an area about 20 miles west of Quang Tri town, has been confirmed with a strength of 500 and the accepted strength of each of the three regiments is 1,500. The acceptance of these two regiments by MACV brings the total of confirmed NVA regiments in South Vietnam to 18.

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4. Operation CEDAR RAPIDS II, a search-and-destroy/security operation, has been launched in the same general area as Operation CEDAR RAPIDS which ended last week. Four battalions of the 1st Brigade, US 1st Infantry Division, are participating in this operation which is designed to provide security along Route 1A in central Binh Duong Province and a wide area on either side of this principal route between Phuoc Vinh and Saigon. An engagement on 23 July with entrenched Viet Cong troops resulted in US losses of one killed and five wounded while the enemy losses included two killed and 14 machine guns and a sizable quantity of ammunition captured.

5. Operation MOKULEIA, conducted by three battalions of the US 25th Infantry Division, has been redesignated Operation KOKO HEAD. The participating units, the area of operation, and the mission remain unchanged. This search-and-destroy operation is being conducted in an area about 20 miles northwest of Saigon. Elements of four Viet Cong battalions with a combined strength of 1,180 men are reported to be in or near the area. Casualty figures for Operation MOKULEIA include 33 Americans killed and 63 wounded. Viet Cong losses were 62 killed and 5 captured.

#### Viet Cong Actions

6. A Viet Cong force of unknown size conducted a mortar attack on Marble Mountain Air Base, one of the largest US helicopter bases in South Vietnam two miles from Da Nang, on 23 July. In the half-hour attack, the guerrillas fired an estimated 30 to 40 mortar shells into the base. A total of 27 Americans sustained minor injuries. Three helicopters and one small fixed-wing aircraft received major damage and seven helicopters and 12 fixed-wing aircraft received minor damage. US aircraft attacked the suspected Viet Cong position. US Marines later made a search of the area, but were unable to establish contact with the enemy.

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7. The Viet Cong attacked the Trai Bi Special Forces camp in Tay Ninh Province about 65 miles northwest of Saigon yesterday with 75 rounds of mortar and recoilless rifle fire. Friendly casualties included one killed and 17 wounded (2 US). Enemy losses are unknown. This camp opened on 24 June 1966 and has been subject to enemy probing attacks in an effort to test the camp's defenses. The camp is located near Highway 22, a major artery into Cambodia and a known Communist infiltration route.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. The Ky government apparently is making some effort to discourage irregularities in the September elections for a constituent assembly, while smoothing the way for qualified candidates.

2. Bui Diem, secretary of state for foreign affairs, told a US official that Prime Minister Ky recently interceded to prevent candidate lists headed by former chief of state Pham Khac Suu and influential publisher Dang Van Sung from being disqualified for procedural shortcomings. He stated that Ky had been willing to risk attack from the regime's critics to save the candidacies of these well-known political figures. Diem also claimed that, acting on his advice, the prime minister had ordered the disqualification of a deputy province chief who was running for an assembly seat in violation of electoral regulations.

3. Diem said that the government also recognizes that there is a danger that overzealous provincial officials will act on its behalf during the course of the election and has therefore scheduled a "seminar" in Saigon this week for province chiefs in order to instruct them on the necessity for an impartial administration of the elections. The press will be invited to attend the seminar sessions.

4. The Viet Cong attacked the VNQDD party headquarters in Quang Tin Province on 16 July, severely wounding the party's leading candidate in the forthcoming election. The attack may represent the first antielection action by the Communists, although the VNQDD's involvement with various government programs and its antistruggle position make it a natural target for the Viet Cong.

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Economic Situation

7. Another round of inflationary wage increases appears to be in the offing. The US Embassy reports that a wage increase just granted by the US combine (RMK-BRJ) is in excess of the 15-percent hike authorized by the mission council. A spot check of combine employees, moreover, indicates considerable disappointment with the increase, and RMK officials believe that new work stoppages cannot be ruled out. Substantial pay increases, ranging from 20 to 70 percent, also have been noted in the private sector of the economy. The CVT, South Vietnam's leading union, has announced that it will open a new drive for higher wages.

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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. A flight of four USAF F-105 Thunderchief aircraft encountered flak and SAMs on 23 July about 25 miles west of Hanoi. One of the F-105s was shot down apparently by a SAM.

Rescue efforts for the two-man crew were not possible because of the location. Another F-105 in this same flight was damaged while taking evasive action but was able to return to its base.

2. A US Navy A-4E Skyhawk fighter-bomber from the carrier Oriskany was hit by ground fire in the vicinity of Vinh while flying an armed reconnaissance mission on 23 July. The pilot headed for the Gulf of Tonkin, ejected, and was picked up by a rescue ship.

3. In other action, four USAF F-105 Thunderchiefs, flying 65 miles southwest of Hanoi, engaged three MIG-17 Frescos on 22 July in an inconclusive action. Neither side suffered any apparent damage.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. North Vietnam apparently attempted over the weekend to relax some of the international tension generated by its own recent propaganda treatment of captured American pilots. Hanoi radio announced on 23 July the establishment of a civilian committee to investigate "US war crimes" and implied that the fate of the US pilots would be determined by this committee. This impression was strengthened by dispatches filed by the AFP correspondent in Hanoi over the weekend which claimed that a "communication" from the Hanoi regime to the socialist members of the Hanoi diplomatic corps described the function of the committee as the conduct of "an investigation on a village-by-village basis which is expected to take a long time."

2. Hanoi's own radio announcements gave the new committee a distinct civilian character but did not discuss its responsibilities. The committee is under the government Council of Ministers and has as its chairman Dr. Pham Ngoc Thach, a well-known DRV personality who is minister of health and reportedly has close personal ties to Ho Chi Minh. The vice chairman is the Supreme Peoples Court president, and the regular membership is heavily weighted with other prominent civilian personalities. Only two members whose background is primarily military have been included.

3. The report of the commission's responsibilities and working methods cannot yet be confirmed. Hanoi has officially said only that the committee has already met once and issued its first communiqué. This was a routine propaganda recounting of US "war crimes" which differed little from two other documents released this weekend by Radio Hanoi--a DRV Foreign Ministry statement describing US "escalation of the war" during the past six months and the first volume of a Liberation Front "Black Book" on US war crimes.

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4. Two other sources have also tried to take a little of the urgency out of the speculation about the fate of the US pilots. A high official of the International Red Cross volunteered his opinion on 21 July that none of the captured airmen would be executed. Jean Sainteny, the French representative who has recently held extensive conversations with both Pham Van Dong and Ho Chi Minh (and who was in Hanoi at the time that the US pilots were paraded through the streets early this month) said in a public interview that he did not believe that any death sentences would be carried out.

Communists Pushing "Unity" Theme in Propaganda

5. Communist propaganda response to the US air strikes on POL facilities is beginning to emphasize the theme of "unity" between the people of North Vietnam and those in the South represented by the Viet Cong. Although the Vietnamese Communists are careful to preserve the fiction that there is no coordinated military effort between the two zones of Vietnam, they do use nationalistic themes in their propaganda to heighten popular support for the war.

6. This week's emphasis on the unity theme was unusual, however. In his well-publicized speech of 17 July, Ho Chi Minh appealed to all the people of Vietnam to increase their efforts against the US, and Liberation Front President Nguyen Huu Tho in his response referred to "President Ho, the leader of all the people." DRV and Front representatives in China also used this theme in addressing last week's Peking rallies, and Chinese chief of state Liu Shao-chi in his 22 July speech charged the US with completely breaking the demarcation line between North and South Vietnam.

7. The Vietnamese may hope by this kind of talk to heighten the belligerency of the Communist propaganda

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response to the air strikes, for it raises in an oblique fashion the possibility of North Vietnamese troops moving across the 17th parallel openly and in large numbers. Such a theme was used about a year ago when the Front first threatened to call on foreign volunteers, but it has not been emphasized extensively since that time. Its resurrection now may indicate that Hanoi feels under some compulsion to make a strong propaganda response to what it has called a "new escalation of the war."

#### Chinese Propaganda Support for Vietnam

8. Peking's propaganda is stressing "unity" with North Vietnam and the Chinese are staging mass rallies in major cities designed to convey the impression that they are more determined than ever to support the struggle against "US imperialist aggression." The latest pledges to assist the Vietnamese Communists however, like those issued in the past, are carefully hedged and do not strengthen Peking's conditional commitment to help Hanoi.

9. An editorial in People's Daily on 24 July hailed a "new high tide of assisting Vietnam in China" and declared that the Chinese have completed every preparation to deal "joint blows" with the Vietnamese against the US--but only when the "Chinese and Vietnamese peoples deem it necessary."

10. Peking claims that thus far five million people have participated in rallies and demonstrations held in 19 major cities. Chinese press reports of these affairs note the role played in them by veterans

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of the "volunteer" forces which fought in Korea. The most recent authoritative Chinese statements, however--by chief of state Liu Shao-chi and vice premier Tao Chu--make no reference to "volunteers" and emphasize Vietnamese determination to fight on even if the struggle lasts "20 years or longer" and results in the destruction of Hanoi, Haiphong, and other cities.

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